УДК 316.728
DOI: 10.25990/socinstras.pss-25.3q41-nq96
EDN: BLCUTX

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ГЕЙМЕРСКАЯ МАСКУЛИННОСТЬ: ВОСПРИЯТИЕ НОРМ МУЖЕСТВЕННОСТИ КИБЕРСПОРТСМЕНАМИ — СТУДЕНТАМИ НИУ ВШЭ

Аннотация. Цель работы — изучить, как члены сообщества геймеров воспринимают нормы маскулинности. Для этого были проведены полуструктурированные интервью с членами клуба «HSE OTTERS». Выявлено, что респонденты следуют определенным нормам гегемонной маскулинности — ценят атлетичность, спортивный образ жизни, инициативность, решительность, ответственность, часто ассоциируют образ мужчины с образом лидера. Однако участники также позволяют себе быть эмоциональными и уязвимыми с близкими людьми, не соблюдая полностью эмоционально сдержанный образ жизни, предписываемый гегемонной маскулинностью. Участники признают, что женщины способны играть не хуже мужчин, и кроме как по голосу опознать игроков-женщин невозможно. Также участники сами не стесняются применять некоторые женские практики вроде использования косметических средств и применения женских аватаров и персонажей в игре.

Ключевые слова: гейминг, маскулинность, восприятие маскулинности, нормы мужественности, киберспорт.

Ссылка для цитирования: Мосеев А. Г. Геймерская маскулинность: восприятие норм мужественности киберспортсменами — студентами НИУ ВШЭ // Петербургская социология сегодня. — 2024. — № 25. — С. 85–105. — DOI: 10.25990/socinstras.pss-25.3q41-nq96; EDN: BLCUTX.

Introduction

The topic of masculinity is widely discussed in modern sociology. Before proceeding to the discussion of the theories that were used in this paper it is necessary to determine what masculinity is in its essence. Basically, masculinity is the collection of norms and behavioural patterns that determines if a person can be called or not. Zdravomyslova states that masculinity is a social construct. She also states that the patterns and cultural

models of masculinity have a cultural and social origin (Zdravomyslova et al. 2018). This means that masculinity is not some external phenomenon that is determined by the factors out of human control and that it is formed largely by the society around. The discussion of masculinity has been going for a long time. Since the year 2000 the popularity of masculinity in sociological studies has been steadily climbing, having only slight fluctuations around the year 2019. However, it hasn't been studied extensively for a very specific category — gamers.

The population of gamers along with the gaming industry itself is quite new for the sociological field. During the same period of time the popularity of gaming and gamers as a population in sociological studies has not been stable, experiencing a significant increase around the year 2019. This suggests that this category has not yet been studied very much in itself, and particularly in terms of masculinity. Taking all of the above into consideration, it is reasonable to conclude that masculinity perception of the gamers is an object worthy of researching. The concept of a gamer is intertwined with the concept of a geek, and both of those differ from the determined image of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1944). This might bring useful insights about the construction of manhood among gamers, since the bespoken concepts are not fully corresponding to the usual norms of masculinity.

Due to the limited resources the population that has been chosen for this research is the "HSE OTTERS" gaming club. This club has been opened in Higher School of Economics in 2017. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic it has been closed down completely. After the Higher School of Economics has returned to the regular format of studying, the club has been opened once more, in 2021. The members of this club are regular participants of various gaming tournaments, so they were deemed fit for the research as "true gamers", who regularly engage in computer games.

The qualitative design has been chosen for this research as it is aimed to reveal new insights into the norms of masculinity, using the semi-structured interview as the method of data collection. Overall, eleven interviews were conducted — apart from the pilot interview — before the saturation was reached.

Literature review

Before diving into the intricacies of masculinity perception among gamers, it is necessary to establish a ground theoretical framework. First, it is necessary to define the boundaries of what will be considered masculinity

in this paper and what implications it brings. It is reasonable to start with the main rules of manhood, best described in the paper by Levant (Levant 1996). In his paper he uses such concept as MRNI (Male Role Norms Inventory). It states that traditional masculinity consists of the following characteristics:

1) avoiding femininity;
2) emotional life restrictions;
3) importance of aggression and firmness;
4) a norm of self-reliance;
5) having the main aim of obtaining high status;
6) sexuality objectification;
7) scorn and hatred towards homosexuality.

Levant also describes three types of strain that the above mentioned characteristics impose on male individuals. The first type of strain described is the discrepancy strain. This type of strain implies that each male person has an internal ideal of what a true man should look like, behave and so on. When a man fails to reach this inner ideal, it creates a strain within him, which can even result in certain mental health issues. The second type of strain described is the dysfunction strain. This kind of strain means that reaching true manhood requires fulfilling certain requirements that the code of manhood implies. These requirements can have negative effects on person's general well-being, health and social ties, being, as the name of the strain says, dysfunctional. The third type of strain is the trauma strain. Basically, it means that the rules of the traditional masculine upbringing can have severe and traumatic effects on the person's mentality.

Some other papers correspond to Levant in some aspects. One of them is the study by Joseph Vandello and Jennifer Bosson (Vandello et al. 2012). They present several definitions of what real manhood is. One states that manhood consists of several traits that are rigid throughout history and stay the same at any place. Another definition implies that the characteristics of manhood are not as rigid and change according to the epoch, the culture it exists in and other factors, be it social or economic ones. The authors conclude that the most stable manhood trait that is present everywhere ant at all times is the constant disquiet that is caused by the emphasis on manhood structure and not its actual essence. Avoidance of all things feminine is the third definition presented by Vandello and Bosson. One of the main tenets of this paper is that manhood is inherently fragile and has quite unclear boundaries. Moreover, the status of men has to be reached. It is done by battling certain obstacles so that their personality and behaviour is deemed typical for true men. However, Vandello and Bosson state that there is no

distinct procedure for obtaining manhood, which brings anxiety and distress. Some of the suggested ways of demonstrating one’s manhood is doing sports or publicly demonstrating dislike to homosexuals. The last trait corresponds to the research by Levant. One more trait of manhood described by Vandello and Bosson is that a person has to publicly demonstrate their own manhood in order to prove they deserve to be called a true man. Manhood is mainly determined by action, not by stable features. All these factors result in men constantly trying to prove themselves. This often leads to risky, aggressive and overly competitive behaviour.

As was stated before, one of the main requirements of masculinity is dismissive es of emotions, restrictions on displaying of feelings. This characteristic of masculinity is described in the research by Way et al. (Way et al. 2014). More specifically, this paper describes the attitude of boys to oppose such emotionally restrictive norms. Way describes young men confronting this status quo by confessing their distress and speaking of their emotions with their friends. They also express their wishes to have close friendships and in general internally oppose the norms that link emotional expressiveness and vulnerability with traits of femininity and homosexuality. However, it does not last long. As time progresses and boys grow older, they learn to comply to these norms. This results in them, for instance, forming groups that start opposing girls and in which they start displaying aggression. The authors also state that explicit resistance to masculine norms of emotional stoicism is rather rare compared to the implicit one.

One of the types of strain that masculinity imposes on men for conforming to the traditional masculinity norms that was mentioned before (Levant 1996) is the trauma strain. The implications of this kind of strain are described in the paper by Moss-Racusin et al. (Moss-Racusin et al. 2010). It is written in this research that men are expected to be strong, assertive and that they have to dominate in a relationship. This brings some negative consequences to men, specifically to their mentality and their relationships with other people. To be exact, it can bring elevated levels of depression to men and cause severe psychological distress. Moreover, this study corresponds with the papers described before, stating that risky behaviour is also potentially harmful to men’s actual, physical health and safety. However, these are not the only types of harm masculinity norms can bring to male individuals. Another type of negative consequences is possible of an individual decides to reject this traditional image of manhood. If a person is deemed passive, overly emotional or if a person is good at something that is considered feminine, they can get ostracized and deemed weak. Moss-Racusin et al. call this phenomenon a backlash. It strengthens gender norms and by doing

so prevents men — and women for that matter — from unleashing their unused potential.

It is necessary also to highlight that the perception ps and manifestations of masculinity are not the same for every group. In the study by Berberova (Berberova 2017), the author explores the masculinity differences between youth and the older generation. She found out, that as a whole the patterns of masculinity are more modernised among the youth compared to the older groups of people. The tendency that was discovered is that the older a man is, the more likely he is to apply his patriarchal identity to reinforce his masculinity. She also found out that polarisation and conventionality of masculine norms are getting weaker among younger people. One more interesting feature of masculinity patterns among the youth is that because there are no clear means of forming one's manhood — similar to what Vandello and Bosson highlighted in their work (Vandello et al. 2012) — young men tend to use things like subculture pal practices, aggression, creativity, brute force and intelligence as the means of constructing their masculinity.

Now when the main features, requirements and some types consequences of masculinity have been established, it is necessary to dive into the other aspect of the chosen population, which is the field of gaming. As long as the research group of this study is the members of "HSE OTTERS" club, who regularly participate in gaming tournaments, it is reasonable to research not only casual gaming, but also e-sport. Let us start with a research by Andrea Braithwaite (Braithwaite 2016). In this paper Braithwaite compares traditional masculinity and another, more specific type of manhood, a so-called geek masculinity. She states that geek masculinity conforms to some aspects of traditional ideal of manhood, it totally rejects other aspects of it. For instance, geeks, as well as regular men, value assertiveness, judgement and mastery, however they do not value such things as athleticism and the culture of sport. This leads to a curious situation. On one hand, geek masculinity happens to associate technological advancement with other aspects of masculinity. On the other hand, geeks abandon some features of traditional masculinity, such as physicality and affiliations for sports, for technology and their gaming routines, which actually sidelines the geeks and makes their lifestyle look odd, unusual, simply weird.

The latter point, about gamers denying physical activity in favour of gaming is discussed in the paper by Namli and Demir (Namli et al. 2020). In their research they study the impact of regular computer gaming on physicality and health. They discovered that prolonged computer gaming results such health issues as obesity and malnutrition. The authors also reveal

that if a person is involved in computer gaming for a long time is less likely to participate in exercise-sports. However, this phenomenon works in the opposite direction as well. The authors also discovered that among gamers who do engage in sports and attention sports clubs there are less obese people than among those who do not attend any sports activities. Prolonged gaming affects not only physical health of the gamers, but also their mental state. As Namli and Demir discovered, that regular gaming can result in such mental impairments as a drop in mental development and possible gaming addiction, which — as the authors discovered as well — men are more prone to than women.

It is necessary to delve deeper into the concept of a geek. The reason for this is that gamers and geeks have significant differences. This difference is researched in the paper by Helen Thronham (Thronham 2008). In her study she discovers that gamers take pleasure not simply in the technological aspect of gaming, but also in the social aspect of it. They enjoy communicating with other gamers while playing. Such gaming events are also regulated by norms of masculinity, to be exact, they take place in traditional "white heterosexual" setting like sports activities or drinking. Overall, gamers try to balance their virtual gaming lives with their real lives and real-life communication and activities. Geeks, however, do not pay much attention to their social circle and spend huge amounts of their time on solo gaming. Another thing that differentiates them from other gamers is their questionable choice of game genre. Sometimes geeks' sexuality is even getting questioned. They are also blamed for their overexcitement over their gaming achievements. Overall, a geek is a exaggerated image of a gamer, who dismisses his social life and substitutes it with virtual reality. What is curious about this phenomenon is that geeks are differentiated from gamers according to the same traditional masculine norms without even changing much, even though the setting is drastically different from the one that constructed them.

Speaking of questionable sexuality of the geeks and general negative attitude towards homosexuality promoted by traditional masculinity, it is necessary to address the paper by Maloney and Caruso (Maloney et al. 2018). In their study they research the content of three gamers who stream their gaming routine on YouTube. In their videos the studied bloggers they express explicit satire to the norms of traditional masculine behaviour. They also behave with quite an affection towards their same-sex peers. The studied videos contain numerous satirising references towards pop culture that are deemed overly masculine. What this paper demonstrates is that the markers of masculinity that were respected before are getting unstable and are facing resistance. However, in some videos there is a very thin line between ironic

homosexual jokes and straight-up homophobic comments. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that modern masculinity that promotes explicit homophobia is now experiencing significant changes towards more inclusive attitudes.

Considering the unorthodox behaviour of the gamers from the previously described study (Maloney et al. 2018), it is necessary to dive a bit deeper into the gender aspects of gaming. This issue is studied in the study by Claudia Wilhelm (Wilhelm 2016). In her research it is revealed that gender roles have basically no impact on gaming behaviour. It does have, however, an effect on gaming motives and the choice of the genre of the game. For example, the choice of action games mediates the negative relationship between femininity and competitiveness. Also, some negative masculine features predict the choice of violent video games.

Continuing the topic of the gender influencing on gaming, it is necessary to discuss the concept of a so-called "white male gamer". For it the paper pay Paaßen et al., where they discuss the credibility the male gamer stereotype. The results of this study have obtained no empirical proof to justify the mentioned stereotype. However, it did provide some insights into why it has formed. In the media the majority of gaming figures are men. Moreover, men are generally more prone to label themselves as gamers compared to women. Additionally, women who actually achieve decent levels of gaming competence are getting sidelined and are barely visible to the larger audience. The gender also, as the previously described study (Wilhelm 2016) has noted, determines the genre choice. Men not only spend more time playing video games on average, men actually give their preferences to the so-called "hard-core" games. Overall, women are actively gatekept from the gaming society and are denied from acceptance as true gamers.

A question that still needs to be addressed is why gaming is so appealing to men. For this reason a study by Jansz (Jansz 2005) conducted a research, where it is researched what factors make gaming popular a ongoing male individuals. It reveals that gaming fulfils men's necessity for competition, challenge and a desire for control. Another factor is that gaming is an opportunity to engage in social interactions with one's peers. Moreover, gaming serves as a means of escapism, it helps to distract oneself from the routine of their daily life. Additionally, games are a way to experience and express certain feelings and have an emotional release. For example, playing hard-core video games allows the gamer to experience positive emotions, such as excitement, pleasure, superiority, as well as negative ones, like disgust, rage, anxiety or fear. This opportunity is also appealing in a sense that a gamer can perform certain actions or experience some

emotions that can be deemed disturbing, unacceptable or even disgusting in other circumstances and with other people. This makes computer games a perfect opportunity for a man to engage into destructive activities and emotions without any repercussions.

Continuing the topic of hard-core games, the study by Greg Blackburn and Erica Scharrer researches the relationship between games with large amounts of violence and certain masculine beliefs. The authors hypothesised that such attributes of traditional masculinity as aggression, firmness, domination over others are correlating with the presence of extreme violence in the games. Unexpectedly, the study has not revealed any associations between violence in games and negative attitudes towards homosexuals. Moreover, game violence does not predict either the avoidance of all things feminine or the proneness to self-reliance.

The question of emotionality among men in general and among gamers in particular deserves more attention. It is covered in the paper by Gaetan et al. (Gaetan et al. 2016). This research reveals an interesting phenomenon. Generally speaking, it is discovered that gamers actually process their emotions better that regular men. Specifically, gamers do not have a preferred strategy of dealing with their emotions, but they do regulate them more effectively. Moreover, gamers tend to experience their emotions more intensely than regular male individuals. The regularity of gaming also plays an important role. Regular gamers are better at managing their emotions than the ones, who play irregularly. The last research that needs to be addressed in the framework of the current study is the paper by Kower et al. (Kowert et al. 2014). There the authors explore the relationship between the amount of online gaming and the width of a person's social circle. Predictably, the research revealed that the more a person is engaged in online gaming, the more narrow their social circle is. Consequently, this leads to gamers with narrower social circles getting less emotional support than people who are not as exposed to gaming and hence have wider social circles.

Research questions

Taking the findings of all the studies discussed above into consideration, it is possible now to determine what aspects of masculinity should be researched among gamers. As it was stated before, the main research question of this study is the following:

RQ: How do gamers from the "HSE OTTERS" university gaming club perceive and manifest masculinity patterns and norms?"

To answer this question, it is necessary to set several tasks aimed to reveal the perception of the respondents regarding each aspect of masculinity. The first aspect is gamers' attitude towards physicality and sport. Some researches state that gamers completely deny this side of life, the other state that regular gamers, unlike geeks, do engage in sports activities. So the first task is:

Task 1: Revealing the gamers' attitudes to sport and physicality.

The next masculinity aspect that poses interest in this context is how gamers manage their emotions. It has been said that gamers are better at regulating their emotions than regular men and are experiencing them more intensively. However, it seems that gamers still comply to the norms of traditional masculinity here, which states that emotions have to be contained and never shown. So this is the second task:

Task 2: Exploring the emotion management strategies of the gamers.

The next aspect of interest is gamers' attitude towards homosexuals. On one hand, gamers like most other men are prescribed by the traditional masculinity norms to show hatred and disgust towards gay men. On the other hand, some of the reviewed studies indicate a trend of inclusivity spreading among gamers. This is the third task:

Task 3: Revealing gamers' attitudes towards homosexuals.

Attitudes to femininity — and women for that matter — is another aspect that is of interest in this research. Traditional masculinity norms require avoiding all things that can be deemed feminine. It also promotes the values of domination and sex. The gaming field itself does not seem welcoming for women either, according to one of the reviewed studies they are getting seriously marginalised. So, this is the fourth task:

Task 4: Discovering what gamers think about women.

One more masculinity aspect that poses interest to this research is gamers' social interactions and relationships, especially with their friends. The studies indicate that one of the traditional masculinity requirements is self-reliance. Moreover, there has been found a negative relationship between the amount of gaming and the width of the person's social circle. However, one of the features of gaming that makes it so appealing to men is its social aspect and an opportunity to spend time with friends. This is the fifth task:

Task 5: Outlining the patterns of gamers' relationships with their peers.

Traditional masculinity has many requirements about what personality traits a man should have: aggression, dominance, confidence, toughness and so on. Many of the reviewed studies indicate that gamers tend to conform to these requirements. It seems useful to find out if the chosen population will as well fall into these patterns. The next task is:

Task 6: Determining what personality traits gamers approve and which they despise.

The final aspect that is interesting to research is the gamers’ ambitions and their desire for dominance and leadership. It has been stated that traditional masculinity values assertive men who dominate other people and who are successful in life. The final task is:

Task 7: Revealing gamers’ attitudes to leadership and career success.

Design and methods

Since the research puts up a goal of discovering how gamers view masculinity norms, it is clear that the design of the research has to be qualitative. The research group of the study is, as was stated before, the members of the “HSE OTTERS” club. They are what can be called e-sportsmen: they not only play for their own joy and pleasure, they also view gaming as a sport, so they regularly train and perform on various tournaments between universities. Among them only male participants were studied. This has apparent reasons, since the goal of the study is to reveal the perception of the masculinity norms by ones who are directly affected by them.

As a method of data collection a semi-structured interview. This method was chosen in order to collect a predetermined set of answers from the respondents and at the same time leave some room for improvising if some questions reveal unexpected attitudes and it is useful to work with those. In order to construct a guide the paper by Schwalbe and Wolkomir was used as a helpful source (Schwalbe et al. 2001). For example, authors suggest to ask him about his thoughts instead of his feelings in case of a man during an interview becomes restrictive about his emotions. Moreover, a request to tell a story is considered to be more efficient than a direct question about his feelings regarding the situation discussed. This led to the more extensive usage of the vignette-questions in the guide.

The interview guide consisted of seven blocks. In the first block the introductory questions were asked about the respondent. Additionally, this block aimed to reveal what the respondents find appealing about computer games and what people they consider gamers. The second block collects information about respondent’s relationships with other club members and about patterns of behaviour that are prevalent in the game and several questions about female gamers and the respondent’s attitude towards them. The third block is a block about emotions and aims to discover the respondent’s emotional behaviour, how a person manages their emotions,

what emotions they find acceptable to express and how the respondents communicate with their friends. The fourth block has a goal of discovering respondents' attitudes to physicality, strength and sports activities. The fifth block asks questions about desired job, ambitions and about respondents' attitudes to leadership. The last block consists of one question and aims to reveal gamers' attitudes to homosexuals.

Eleven interviews were conducted. They were later transcribed into text. The transcripts were subjected to open coding. When all the codes were distinguished, they, in their turn, were subjected to axis coding in order to distribute the found attitudes into groups.

Results and discussion

The respondents' answers were somewhat unexpected. In some categories their attitudes were similar to those revealed in the reviewed studies, in other categories they were drastically different. Six sub-questions were established, so it is reasonable to describe the results in the same order as them. The aim of Task 1 was to discover gamers' attitudes to sports and physicality in general. In the axis coding scheme these attitudes are coded into the "desired appearance" section. It has been revealed that the gamers have no certain ideal image of a man in terms of appearance. One of the respondents did name the features that are traditionally considered manly, like athletic build or prominent cheekbones that look brutal:

"We are talking about an ideal world, that is, where I will now describe an ideal man. That is, this is an athletic build, there, well, facial features also change. That is, when you play sports and somehow raise testosterone, that is, let's say, here are the cheekbones. Men have cheekbones, there, it's brutal. The brow ridges, they really stick out [*Мы говорим про идеальный мир, то есть где идеального мужчину сейчас буду описывать. То есть это спортивное телосложение, там, ну, черты же лица тоже меняются. То есть когда ты занимаешься спортом и как-то поднимаешь тестостерон, то есть, допустим, вот скулы. У мужчин же скулы, там, это же брутально. Надбровные дуги, они вот прям выпирают*]*".*

However, almost all respondents said that it was important for them to be fit and to look athletic. Most of them also answered that in order to reach the desired fitness they visit the gym on a regular basis. What was unexpected is that a significant part of the respondents also put value in their style: how they dress, how well-groomed they look. Many respondents answered that they used facial care products, for instance in order to get rid of acne, and even undergo some beauty procedures:

“...I’ve had a lot of facial procedures, like: facial cleansing, facial polishing, some kind of facial crap, ozone therapy — they’ve done everything to me, in short [*...я много процедур для лица делал, там, из серии: чистка лица, шлифовка лица, какая-то хрень лица, озонотерапия — чего мне только не делали, короче*]*”.*

They also claim to use hair products, deodorants, perfume and some other products. Overall, the respondents put much value their appearance. It applies not only to how athletic they look, but also how well they dress and how neat they appear.

The goal of Task 2 was to discover how gamers deal with their emotions. In this sense the revealed attitudes to some extent coincide with the findings of the reviewed studies. Many respondents told that they always know what they’re feeling. Some told they try to analyse what emotions they are experiencing a certain moment:

“if I think about it, I usually, just for myself, I can immediately understand what I feel: am I sad or happy, I can quickly understand [*если я задумываюсь, я обычно, вот именно для самого себя, я могу сразу понять, что я чувствую: мне грустно или рад, я могу быстро понять*]*”.*

The respondents also revealed how the actual gaming makes them feel. For instance, most of the respondents say that losing makes them either sad or enraged, whereas winning can not only bring joy, but it also can bring sadness if they feel that the victory was not earned. Most of the respondents answered that they considered themselves to be emotional people. But what is more interesting is that all the respondents say that they hold back and conceal their emotions. Some of the reasons for this is that expressing emotions can be harmful in a certain situation or that they do not want their negative emotions to spread into other people. Negative emotions are concealed more often than the positive ones:

“...I will try as much as possible not to make it so that the team does not feel it, so that no one after me falls into the same state. Accordingly, I can be upset inside myself, but at the same time no one will know about it, and well, and will not understand it [*...я постараюсь максимально не как бы сделать так, чтобы команда этого не чувствовала, чтобы никто вслед за мной не попадал в это же состояние. Соответственно, я могу быть расстроен внутри себя, но при этом никто об этом не узнает, и, ну, и не поймет этого*]*”.*

In general, most of the respondents do not consider showing emotions as something that should be penalised. However, they see an impulsive and hysterical person as a weak one.

The aim of Task 3 was to distinguish the gamers' attitudes towards homosexuality. In order to do this, the respondents were asked what they think about a The law that prohibits the LGBT[1] propaganda. In this sense the results are drastically different from the ones obtained in the reviewed studies. None of the respondents answered that they have positive attitudes towards this law. Some respondents are confused by the purpose of this law, others are concerned about how this law is formulated. Several respondents believe that the state should not get involved into people's personal relationships and that they do not think there is anything wrong with LGBT[2] people.

Some respondents have a controversial attitude towards this law, and consider a possibility of this law having a reason to be created:

"Probably, it was in our country that this had to be done, because we have a lot of such traditional conservative people, for whom LGBT and, especially, propaganda, is a downright sin [*Наверное, именно в нашей стране это надо было сделать, потому что у нас очень много таких традиционных консервативных людей, которым ЛГБТ*[3] *и тем более пропаганда, — для них это прям грех*]*".*

The goal of Task 4 was to reveal what attitudes gamers have towards women in general and to female-gamers in particular. The first interesting aspect is what word gamers use to mention women in a conversation. The most popular version is either "girl" or "woman", however, some more harsh versions are used infrequently:

"Sometimes a 'chick', sometimes a 'girl', a 'young lady'. Well, I usually say 'girl'. But everyone has their own way, some are 'chicks', some are 'women' [*Иногда вылетает там «тянка», иногда вылетает «девочка», «девушка». Ну, я обычно «девочка» говорю. А так, кто во что горазд, кто — «телка», кто — «баба»*]*".*

Gamers believe that women are not fit for the physical work. However, they believe that women are superior in work with kids and in work that requires creativity. In terms of intellectual work the women are believed to be nothing less than men. In terms of appearance some of the respondents believe that women should be more concerned about their appearance than men:

"Well, girls should take more care of their appearance than men, actually, yes. That's why they are the beautiful sex. [*Ну, девушки больше должны следить за своей внешностью на самом деле, чем мужчины, да. На то они и красивый пол*]".

[1] Организация признана экстремистской и запрещена в Российской Федерации.
[2] Организация признана экстремистской и запрещена в Российской Федерации.
[3] Организация признана экстремистской и запрещена в Российской Федерации.

However, the respondents do not think that there is a certain ideal image that all women should reach, but plumpness is undesirable for them as well as extreme thinness. In general all the respondents believe that women should be well-groomed and have gentle features. In terms of personality the respondents haven't named any particular characteristics, but they believe that swearing feels more odd when it comes from a woman. Speaking of female-gamers, most respondents believe that there are far less of those than male-gamers. They admit that there is a certain degree of discrimination among gamers towards women. They mentioned that many women tend not to speak in the voice-chat during the game in order not to receive negative backlash:

"Because usually, especially in some very toxic communities, it happens that a girl just says something in voice chat, and immediately some smart guy will come along and say: 'Woman, go to the kitchen,' and that's it. And he'll be like: 'Well, that's it, we lost, we have a woman on our team' [*Потому что обычно, особенно в каких-нибудь очень токсичных комьюнити, бывает такое, что девушка только что-то говорит в voice-chat, и ей сразу же найдется какой-то умник, который скажет: «Женщина, на кухню», — и все. И такой типа: «Ну все, мы проиграли, у нас женщина в команде»*]*".*

However, the respondents believe, that if a woman does not speak in the voice-chat, it is almost impossible to distinguish female players from male ones. Some of the possible indicators are the characters used — women tend to use female characters — the neatness of their account ant their photo. Their own attitude to female-gamers is that as long as they are good players, they have nothing against women on their team:

"That is, I judge purely by her personal skill. That is, if a girl plays at the rank she plays at, then I don't mind her at all [*То есть я сужу сугубо по ее личному скилу. То есть если девушка играет на тот ранг, на котором она играет, то я вообще не против нее*]*".*

The respondents also think that female-gamers are more fit for supporting positions in the game. More specifically, in the Dota 2 game women often tend to use the character of Crystal Maiden, a supporting character which is inherently associated with female-players. They also believe that women are less competitive in the game and that they behave in a less risky manner. The respondents also believe that female gamers are more mature and are less prone to participating in quarrels in the game chats compared to men.

It is important to address the implication of the traditional masculinity that requires men to avoid all things feminine. All the respondents answered

that they have nothing against using female characters in the game and having a girl — for instance a portrait of an anime-girl — as their photo.

The aim of Task 5 was to reveal how gamers tend to communicate with their friends and peers. It turns out that gamers have nothing against showing emotions and being vulnerable with friends:

"I cried in front of my friends. Again, when my dog died. Well, that's it. That is, these are normal emotions [*Я плакал при друзьях. Опять же, когда у меня собака умерла. Ну вот. То есть это нормальные эмоции*]*".*

They also have nothing against physical expressions of affection, such as handshakes, hugs, slaps on the shoulders. All the respondents say that they openly express their joy when they meet with a friend they have not seen for a long time. What is interesting is that the respondents feel comfortable with giving compliments about appearance to each other. Swearing is also common and approved among their peers.

When the respondents engage in a conflict, their first strategy is to calm themselves down, de-escalate the conflict and pull away from it. Some of the respondents believe that if an opponent is hysterical, it is pointless to argue because you cannot prove anything to them. They also claim that gamers do not have a lot of rules how to behave in the game, but they do claim that mocking other players, insulting them and cheating is highly despised by the community. It can even come to a person, who tends to mock other players a lot, to be banned from the game.

What is interesting is that many of the respondents claim that they have not built any close relationships with the other members of the "HSE OTTERS" club. They mentioned that the communication between the members has for the most part been an online communication with only rare face-to-face meetings.

The aim of Task 6 was to find out if the gamers comply the traditional masculine norms of being assertive, tough, aggressive and dominant. To some extent the respondents to fall into the traditional patterns: they value such personality traits as determination, self-sufficiency, responsibility, confidence, persistence and bravery. Some of the respondents also claim to value such traits as sense of humour, good manners, virtue, sincerity and critical thinking. However, there are some typically masculine traits that the respondents despise: aggression, excessive temper, arrogance. They also believe such traits as indiscipline, hypocrisy, inability to admit mistakes and bad manners to be negative traits of a man:

"Well, some kind of, probably, excessive irascibility. And, probably, attempts to move a person to more hostile sides of the conflict than to

resolve it. Some kind of manifestation of coolness, I don't know, associations, all that. Well, it seems to me that all conflicts are resolved with the help of words [*Ну, какая-то, наверное, все же излишняя вспыльчивость. И, наверное, попытки перевести человека в более враждебные стороны конфликта, нежели решение его. Какое-то проявление крутости, я не знаю, ассоциации, вот это все. Ну, мне кажется, все же все конфликты решаются при помощи слов*]*".*

In Task 7 the goal was to explore gamers' ambitions, more exactly their career desires and choices. It also aims to reveal gamers' attitudes towards leadership. Consequently, many respondents see themselves as analysts, logistics specialists and IT specialists in the future. They value such things as the prestige of the specialty, the possibilities of further development and the versatility of their specialty to be of value. Most of the respondents are unwilling to work for hire and prefer to start their own business in the future.

The respondents see the leader as someone who is responsible, determined, has knowledge in the sphere of their expertise, organised, not afraid of mistakes, decisive and good at communicating with other people and capable of motivating them:

"Well, what makes a person a leader is the ability to analyze a large amount of information and distribute responsibilities and the ability to take responsibility and make decisions [*Ну, человека лидером делает способность, собственно, анализировать большой объем информации и распределять обязанности и способность брать на себя ответственность и принимать решения*]*".*

Some of the respondents see themselves as leaders, however not all of those claim to possess the mentioned qualities of a good leader. Some of the mentioned qualities the respondents claim to have obtained because of their extensive gaming career, such as ability to work in a team, an ability to lead disputes, enhanced communication skills and taking responsibility. What is interesting is that many of the named features of a leader coincide with the features of a true, perfect man, which leads to a conclusion that the respondents inherently see a man in a position of a leader, which can be explained by the fact that some of the respondents are leaders in their gaming teams and peer groups.

Generally, the respondents see gaming as a means of leisure, relaxation, entertainment, but also as a means of escapism, emotional relief and competition. They claim that it helps them to remember not only gaming skills, but also soft skills, such as English.

Conclusions and limitations

The results of the study indicate that gamers from the "HSE OTTERS" club conform to some norms of traditional masculinity and oppose the other ones. They value athleticism and sport, they believe a man should be proactive, responsible, decisive, and confident. Many of the personal traits of a perfect man in their mind are the same as the qualities of a leader, so it brings up a conclusion that the participants usually see a man as a leader. However, the gamers, who participated in the research, conform to an emotionally restrictive lifestyle that traditional masculinity promotes only to a certain extent. They allow themselves to be emotional, physically affectionate and vulnerable with their friends, but they often hold their emotions, especially negative ones, back, but not because they believe them to be not masculine, but because they do not want those negative feelings to spread onto other people. Not many gamers in the club have close relationships with other club members and the communication is mostly an online one. Some of the gamers they communicate with are women and the participants have not shown any signs that they think themselves superior over them. They claim men to be more fit for the physical jobs, but admit that women are better at working with children. They believe female gamers to be less risky and competitive, but give them credit for being more mature not to engage in frequent fights in the game chats. They also admit that without women speaking in the voice chat it is almost impossible to distinguish them for male players. The participants themselves are not opposing some feminine practices, like using a female character in a game or using cosmetic products to maintain their appearance. They also haven't expressed any open hostility towards homosexuality, which is often one of the main requirements of traditional masculinity.

However, the research has several limitations. Firstly, the research group was limited to one gaming club in one university. This can be a source of bias in the results since Higher School of Economics collects a distinct contingent of people and students of other universities may have drastically different mindsets. Secondly, the group was limited in terms of age. Mindsets tend to change over time. Moreover, as it was noted in the literature review, different age groups have different attitudes toward masculinity and realize them in different manners (Berberova 2017). It is logical to assume, that various gamer groups from different generations might as well have their own opinions about manhood. So, in the further research it is advised to expand the research group in order to reach more variety among the participants of the study.

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Статья поступила в редакцию: 01.08.2023;
поступила после рецензирования и доработки: 09.09.2024;
принята к публикации: 25.09.2024.

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GAMING MASCULINITY: MASCULINITY NORMS PERCEPTION BY CYBERSPORTSMEN — HSE STUDENTS

Abstract. The topic of masculinity, its forms and components has been an object of interest for researchers for a long time by now. In every group masculinity manifests itself in its own distinct way. Amongst other groups cyber sportsmen are a special one, relatively young, but already attracts attention of the researchers. The students of Higher School of Economics are a distinct group as well, which hasn't been studied neither in terms of masculinity, nor in terms of gaming. So, the research question is: "How gamers from HSE cyber sport club perceive masculinity norms?" The methods applied here are approximately 10 semi-structured interviews with the "HSE OTTERS" club.

Keywords: gaming, masculinity, perception of masculinity, norms of masculinity, cyber sport.

For citation: Moseev A. G. Gaming masculinity: masculinity norms perception by cybersportsmen — HSE students // St. Petersburg Sociology Today. 2024. No. 25. P. 85–105. DOI: 10.25990/socinstras.pss-25.3q41-nq96; EDN: BLCUTX.

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Received: 01.08.2023;
revised after review: 09.09.2024;
accepted for publication: 25.09.2024.